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While restless conservatives such as Texas Rep. Jeb Hensarling and South Carolina Sen. Jim DeMint are blaming their party's problems on its congressional leadership, the right wing of the GOP seems to be more bark than bite when it comes to forcing changes in how Republicans do business on Capitol Hill.

In the House, Hensarling's Republican Study Committee is demanding a vote on a partywide earmark moratorium, but GOP insiders say an internal tally shows that the ban would fail by a 2-to-1 ratio.

In the Senate, DeMint is launching a new political action committee this week aimed at raising money only for conservative Republicans, but it may be a lonely pursuit if Republican candidates in competitive races decide they don't want to be so closely associated with the party's far-right flank.

That doesn't mean the rabble-rousing won't cause headaches for GOP leaders.

Hensarling, the chairman of the RSC, has gathered more than the 50 signatures he needs to force an internal caucus vote on the unilateral earmark moratorium. The Texan could call for a vote anytime, thereby forcing members to choose between banning earmarks and supporting House Minority Leader John A. Boehner (R-Ohio), who opposes earmarks himself but doesn't want to get ahead of a majority of his caucus.

In the longer term, Hensarling's conservative colleagues say they're prepared to run a full slate of candidates to challenge Boehner and others in the GOP House leadership when the 111th Congress convenes in January.

GOP House leaders are laughing off the notion that an insurrection is under way.

Boehner and Republican Conference Chairman Adam Putnam of Florida met with Hensarling last week to discuss the RSC's concerns. The trio is slated to meet again Tuesday with a handful of fellow conservatives, including Reps. John Campbell of California, Mike Pence of Indiana, Tom Price of Georgia, Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and John B. Shadegg of Arizona.

The leaders are incorporating some of the group's demands into an economic recovery package they are scheduled to unveil this week. But the two sides remain deadlocked over the earmark question, and some Republicans have begun to grumble about the hardball tactics of their more conservative colleagues.

A current Republican leader says that Hensarling and the conservatives "are doing Rahm's work for him" — a reference to Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), the former Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman who helped orchestrate the Democrats' takeover of the House two years ago.

Hensarling says the earmark ban is important enough to fight for no matter how the Republican caucus ultimately votes on it. Boehner's office says the leader is making progress on the issue and will continue to do so with or without a caucus vote.

"The strategy the leadership has pursued to gain consensus and focus on Democrats has been successful. Over three-quarters of our members support an earmark freeze, and we are putting the pressure where it should be: on the Democrats who now control the earmark favor factory," said Boehner spokesman Michael Steel. "We are always looking for the best way of accomplishing our goal of cutting wasteful Washington spending, so Boehner's door has been open and will always be open to discuss these issues."

On the Senate side, DeMint knows that his conservatives-only PAC might not be popular with party leaders. “If feathers are ruffled, so be it, but that’s not what I’m trying to do,” DeMint said. “I owe it to the majority of the Republicans to help elect more conservatives to the Senate and fight for the principles that have made America great. Other people can help the party’s moderates.”

DeMint’s PAC could violate Ronald Reagan’s 11th Commandment. He acknowledges that it could also clash with the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which will be working hard to reelect moderate yet vulnerable Republican incumbent Sens. Gordon Smith of Oregon and Norm Coleman of Minnesota.

“The NRSC is bound by party constraints, but PACs play a different role,” DeMint said. “There’s a large portion of our base that won’t write checks for Democrat-lite politicians, like Lincoln Chafee. [The new PAC] gives conservatives a new outlet to rebuild our party.”

On DeMint’s website for the Senate Conservative Action fund, one of the first blog posts bemoans the fact that only 15 Republicans voted against the Farm Bill — a sign, DeMint believes, that the GOP still has a long way to go if it wants to make a statement on government spending.

DeMint says he’s not out to undermine his party’s Senate election efforts, but rather to promote conservative alternatives who can right the party’s listing ship.

Moderate Republicans say it’s the wrong way to go.

“If this is their strategy to win back the majority, it’s guaranteed to fail,” said former Rep. Charlie Bass (R-N.H.), who now serves as chairman of the Main Street Republican Partnership, a group of moderates. “When we have failures in elections, conservatives tend to think that only conservatives can save the party.”